in a soda fountain and card-tables, and instal a moving-picture machine. The company was to share expenses and profits. Ten cents would buy an evening's admission to everything.

The chief pounced on the scheme, and the thing went like wild-fire. Within a month it was paying expenses, and more.

"A success? Of course it's a success, the way Richard manages it," sparkled Miss Felicia. "Ask Mr. Augustus to come up Saturday evening, and see how admirably Richard superintends things."

AUGUSTUS went. He came home at midnight, with a black eye and a sprained wrist. At first he wouldn't tell me a word; but I screwed it out of him.

The cement men were a sober, well behaved crowd. But about ten o'clock, when everything was going as smooth as silk, along came a half tipsy gang from the levee contract up river. They swarmed across the gang-plank, and demanded admittance. Richard went on deck, and explained that, being Saturday night, the boat was crowded. Sorry, but he must ask them to come some other night.

Most of the gang turned back, grumbling. But a dozen or so shouldered right in. One drunken rowdy took the lead.

"We've got a right on a public boat!" he yelled. "Rush him, boys!"

The gang threw themselves at Richard. A crowd of cement men dashed gleefully into the fray. There ensued what Augustus described as the liveliest free-for-all he ever mixed into. I regret to say that he evidently enjoyed it. Richard bolted into the thick of the scrimmage, headlong. Three minutes later the levee gang scuttled ashore, a sadder and a wiser crew. Richard, chortling with laughter, but queerly white, dropped on a chair. Blood dripped from his right sleeve.

"One of those scalawags must have stuck a knife into me. Odd that I didn't feel it—"

He pitched out of his chair and lay limp.

Richard had guessed rightly. The dirk had struck twice—and struck deep. Richard would live, so the doctor told Miss Felicia, very gently, but he must lie still for weeks, perhaps months. There was a lung puncture.

"Richard is wonderful," said Miss Felicia, her lips parched, her brown eyes burning. "When he's so patient, surely I can't dare be unhappy."

"But who will run the boat?"

"I will."

"*Felicia Stafford!*"

"Yes; I mean it, Miss Lillie." Her beautiful face grew stern. "Richard—sha'n't ever know. Don't look so shocked. Hard work never hurt anybody, Miss Lillie."

Hard work—maybe not. But hard work, plus worry, plus grief, plus torturing fear! No wonder Miss Felicia grew white and drawn and silent. But she ruled each day like the princess she was. She nursed Richard; she ran that boat. She never faltered, never whined. And the deeper springs never failed her. Times I'd go there, and see Richard lying so wan and spent, all life and will drained out of him. Then I'd see his eyes meet Miss Felicia's, and my own eyes would dim for thankfulness. The old enchanting magic still called in their hearts. For them, the winds of Arcady still blew.

After four months, Richard could sit up. Two months more, and he could drag on crutches to his tool-house, where he worked long hours.

"Richard always had a talent for invention. He is working on a new type of steamship propeller," Miss Felicia told me.

"Inventions!" groaned Augustus, when I told him. "Swing out the life-boats!"

BY June, Richard, still on crutches, was hobbling back and forth to the overall factory, where he helped in the office. In August came the war. The factory shut down promptly. Richard went back to his tool-shed and his propeller. By September the cement plant shut down. Miss Felicia was left with the worthless, gaudy boat on her hands.

They got through the winter somehow—nobody knows just how.

One muggy April morning, I took the packet for St. Louis. The first person I met on board was Miss Felicia.

"Yes, I'm going to the city. A business errand," she said quietly, to my greeting.

"Let me go with you. My shopping can wait," I urged. Somehow, her hot, tense face scared me.

"Oh, I can manage alone, Miss Lillie."

"Well, I'm going with you, whether or no," I insisted, old Meddlesome Matty that I am.

Miss Felicia stared away from me, out at the low green shore. She was quivering all over. Suddenly she turned to me, with a desperate courage.

"No, Miss Lillie, please. I'd rather go shopping alone."

"Why, Felicia—"

"Because—because I'm not going to buy, but to sell."

"To sell—what?"

"Listen, Miss Lillie. Richard has finished his propeller model, and patented it. But—we find it will take money to put it before the ship-builders. A good deal of money. I am going to—to borrow some—on my pearls—so that he can go to Philadelphia and offer his patent for sale."

My head swam.

"Felicia, you're mad. You—you're throwing those jewels away. You never can buy them back. Never."

"Yes, I shall, Miss Lillie." Felicia's voice rang steel. "It may take some time. All inventions are a little slow. But Richard's propeller is a work of genius. It can not fail."

"But your mother's pearls! Can't you sell the diamonds, instead?"

"The diamonds went long ago. When poor little Aunty left us. Doctors, nurses—the diamonds barely tided us over."

"Felicia! If you'd only let me help—"

"No, Miss Lillie! No; I can not. Not even you.

"Richard will make successful disposal of his patent, I know," she went on in that clear, unflinching voice. "Before the year is out, you'll see us quite prosperous. It will be good to be prosperous again," she added, with a queer, harsh little laugh.

I followed her glance. She was staring across the cabin at a baby, crowing and bouncing in his young mother's arms. Her eyes were wide with a terrible envy.

"I don't think I'm unreasonable, Miss Lillie. But sometimes I get a bit sullen, when I see—when I see what we can't afford."

"Felicia, don't!" I cried out, stabbed through with pity.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lillie. I forgot myself. Now, good-by. I'll meet you at the wharf for the six o'clock boat. No, please! I am going alone."

Three days later, Richard, pallid and frail, leaning heavily on his crutches, started East. Miss Felicia saw him off. She had on an old white dress, done up crisp as new, and fresh silk roses in her hat, and she bade him good-by as lightly as if he was off for a week's trout-fishing.

"It's such a satisfaction to know he's off at last," she smiled to me buoyantly. Under the rose-wreathed hat, her eyes were wet, her sweet mouth trembled. Terror pulsed in her throat and whitened her cheeks to ashes. "As I told Richard, now our fortune is made. All that remains is the trifling formality of this sale."

"'Trifling formality—' Gosh!" sighed Augustus, when I told him.

"The late King Solomon," he went on, "once observed that a good wife is above rubies. But a wife who is a good booster, a wife who brags about you right and left, —she puts Solomon's gracious lady into the discard. That girl's faith would wake the fighting spirit in a clam."

THE hot spring days fled on. It was a month since Richard went away; six weeks; two months. Day after scorching day, Miss Felicia went down the hill past my house, to get her mail. Day after day, she climbed back up the hill, her face a little whiter, her smile a little more fixed. Sometimes she had a letter in her hand; sometimes not. Always she bragged her brags, assured, serene. Richard was getting on splendidly. No, he didn't write details. "Success, you know, needs no explanation."

Suddenly, like fire through dry grass, an ugly rumor hissed through the town.

Richard Bellamy had failed. He had spent Miss Felicia's last cent. He was never coming back. Very like, those "letters from Richard" were all her piteous pretense. He had deserted her. Well! A jail-bird! What else could you expect?

LATE one sweltering June afternoon, Miss Felicia went by, on her forlorn daily journey. She swayed a little as she walked. Under the faded old parasol, she looked fagged to exhaustion. I watched for her to come back, meaning to call her in and give her some elderberry wine. As she came around the corner, I jumped up, then saw that she was turning in at my gate.

I hurried down the walk. At sight of her face, my heart dropped, lead.

She came staggering toward me, whiter than clay. Her lips were bitten in, her eyes were flaming.

"Good afternoon, Miss Lillie." She spoke up, sharp and hoarse. Her eyes glittered. The letter in her hand shook with her long, hard breaths. "I stopped in to ask a favor. I—I want to telegraph to Richard. I haven't any change with me. Could you lend me fifty cents?"

Stupidly I fumbled in my purse. So it had come to this! Richard had failed—and she hadn't even the fifty cents to send him her loyal cry of love and sympathy.

"Yes," she went on in that strange, high, shaken voice. "I want to acknowledge his letter, and it's after bank hours; so I can't get in to cash a check."

Pretense again. They hadn't had a penny in the bank for two mortal years. I knew that, for Augustus is cashier.

"I do wish I could get into the bank," she added. "I shall be scared to death to keep this in the house overnight."

"Scared to keep what?"

"This. If I just could deposit it—"

"Deposit—"

"Look, Miss Lillie."

She thrust two fingers into the letter and drew out a purplish oblong strip. Carefully she laid it on my outstretched hand.

I reckon I gaped at that purple strip a good two minutes. When I did speak, the words came out of me in witless gasps and gurgles. I couldn't believe my eyes. I didn't dare. Yet the breath was nigh driven out of me with amazement and unbelief.

"Felicia! It isn't—it can't be—"

"Yes, it is, Miss Lillie." Then suddenly Felicia's arms went round me, and Felicia's laughing, sobbing, exultant face was pressed to mine. "It's a check—a check for five thousand dollars. The advance from the Craven ship-builders. Then there's twenty thousand more coming as soon as the contracts are drawn. Oh, Miss Lillie, put your hat on this minute, and go to St. Louis with me, and help me buy back my pearls!"

I reckon there isn't much more to tell. Miss Felicia and I went to St. Louis on the packet next morning, and bought back her pearls, from the limpid old necklace to the Judge's sleeve-buttons.

Five days later, Richard Bellamy came home. Somewhere on the way, he'd mislaid his crutches. He leaped off the train, and came racing down the platform, his face shining like a boy's. But when he saw Miss Felicia waiting for him, all the blown triumph went out of him, and into his face came the deep, still wonder of their wedding night.

I MET Miss Felicia at the lace counter at Field's, the last time I was in Chicago. They live in Chicago now, for Richard is Western manager for the Craven firm. For a moment, I didn't know her. She had on a gray velvet dress, the mist-gray of a pussy-willow stalk, and under its short skirt were the slenderest little gray shoes, and over it rippled a great coat of silver fur.

Framed in the flaring, audacious collar, Miss Felicia's face was rosy as arbutus, and her eyes were brown stars—and I know that Miss Felicia will never see thirty again.

"I wish all Salerno could see you now," I said, when she'd all but squeezed the breath out of me. "Dressed up like a queen in a picture-book, and buying real Valenciennes by the bolt!"

"Real Valenciennes isn't a bit too fine." Miss Felicia touched the fairy edgings softly. "It's for Richard Second's christening dress, you know. Oh, Miss Lillie!" Her brown eyes shone on me, her soft hands gripped me tight. "Come home with me, quick, and see him! Think of it—he's six weeks old to-day, and you've never even laid eyes on him! He's his father right over again. The most wonderful—"

Somehow the utter rapture in her face made me choke all up.

"Braggart forever!" choked I.

"She staggered toward me. 'I stopped to ask a favor. I—I want to telegraph to Richard. Could you lend me fifty cents?'"